



Clinch River 2008

From its origin near the town of Tazewell, the Clinch River flows some 135 miles through the heart of Southwest Virginia, reaching portions of Tazewell, Russell, Wise and Scott Counties before crossing the Tennessee state line. The Clinch contains more species of fish than any river in Virginia. It supports populations of sport fish like smallmouth bass, spotted bass, rock bass, sunfish, crappie, walleye, musky, freshwater drum, channel catfish, and flathead catfish. It also supports one of only two sauger populations in the state. Largemouth, white, and striped bass are also occasionally encountered, particularly in the lower reaches of the river.

Fish population samples collected in 2006 yielded good numbers of smallmouth bass compared to previous samples. The 2006 sampling catch rate of 93 fish per hour was well above average for this river. Smallmouth bass relative abundance (number of fish collected per hour of sampling) is typically about average in the Clinch compared to other smallmouth bass rivers in Virginia. The Clinch also scores about average for size of smallmouths, with only 11 percent of the smallmouth sampled measuring more than 14 inches total length, and less than five percent longer than 17 inches.

Rock bass size and numbers were very impressive in the 2006 samples. Rock bass were collected at a rate of 113 fish per hour. Channel catfish were abundant in some sections of the river, and freshwater drum were more abundant than in past samples. Sunfish were abundant in the slower pools, and crappies were collected at a few locations.

Walleye fingerlings were stocked each year from 2005 to 2007. A few of these young walleyes were collected in 2006, along with some older and larger walleyes. Sauger are not common, but two separate state records were landed in 2005. Musky are also present, in low densities.

There is an 11-14-inch slot limit in effect for bass in the Clinch River, and a 30-inch minimum size limit for musky. Statewide creel limits apply for all species. The Clinch River has been declared navigable waters in Virginia from near the town of Richlands in Tazewell County to the Virginia-Tennessee state line in Scott County. The Department and the Tennessee Valley Authority have developed several access points along the river. The uppermost launch site is located at Blackford in Russell County, and the last take-out is located near the Tennessee-Virginia state line.

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